German Social Democratic leader enters into discussions with Pegida

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On Tuesday Gregor Gysi, head of the Left Party fraction in parliament, rushed to the assistance of SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel to defend his discussions with Pegida members. The SPD chief and vice chancellor participated in a discussion event with Pegida demonstrators in Dresden on Friday evening, organized by the Center for Political Education in the state of Saxony.

Gabriel's discussion initiative provides official recognition to the movement of the self-styled "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West" (Pegida) precisely at the moment when the openly fascistic character of this grouping has become clear.

Two days earlier, the founder of the right-wing demonstrations, Lutz Bachmann, resigned after it emerged that he had made Internet postings calling foreigners "cattle," "garbage," and "filth." The Pegida founder also posted a picture of himself with a Hitler moustache and hairstyle on Facebook. The public prosecutor's office has started investigative proceedings against him.

Nevertheless, Gabriel met with Pegida demonstrators. After the meeting, Gabriel claimed he had participated in the exchange of ideas with Pegida neither in his official government capacity as vice chancellor nor in his role as head of the SPD. He absurdly claimed he was in Dresden only by chance and had taken part in the meeting as a private individual, out of personal interest. In fact, Gabriel sought to use his position as a high ranking representative of the government and of the SPD in order to provide the right-wing movement with official legitimacy.

Gabriel and Gysi justify their discussions with Pegida by claiming that the right-wing marches reflect legitimate fears and concerns of broad sections of the population. Gysi told *Tagesspiegel* that the "large support for Pegida demonstrations" is a result of the "excessive demands imposed on people," particularly in the eastern states of Germany. Former East German citizens were suddenly made "not only into German citizens, but at the same time into European and world citizens." As a result, they experienced "how everything in their surroundings became alien when other cultures and other people began to have an influence."

These same arguments have been used for months in order to legitimize and justify the racist and anti-Islamic marches.

The truth is that the right-wing demonstrations are the result of a deliberate political and media campaign, during which it has also become well known that Pegida initiator Lutz Bachmann has a criminal record, is still on parole, and openly voices racist and fascistic standpoints.

Last fall, when he called for Monday protests "against the Islamization of the West," only a few dozen radical right-wingers attended. However, these demonstrations received thoroughly disproportionate attention in the media and politicians of all parties proclaimed their understanding of the "justified concerns" of the demonstrators.

The number of participants in the demonstrations was systematically exaggerated by the police and the media. As the counter-demonstrations increased in size, the media reacted by focusing even more attention on them, publishing reports, interviews with Pegida demonstrators and discussions with experts. On Sunday evening a week ago, Kathrin Oertel, chief organizer of the protests and a childhood friend of Lutz Bachmann, was invited to Günther Jauch's prominent TV talk show.

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This gave her the opportunity to present her fascistic views to a mass, primetime audience. She used the opportunity to attack multiculturalism, Koran schools and supposed hate preachers. At the same time, she demanded more restrictions on the right to asylum. She was supported by the vice president of the right-wing conservative Alternative for Germany (AfD), Alexander Gauland, who called Pegida the natural ally of his party.

It is no accident that both SPD head Gabriel and Left Party parliamentary fraction chief Gysi call for dialogue with Pegida. This becomes clear in the context of the recent developments in France and Greece.

The former president of the Socialist Party and current French president, François Hollande, has systematically exploited the terror attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in a campaign against Muslims. At the same time, he has curried favor with the fascistic Front National (FN) by inviting its leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysée Palace.

And on Monday, Alexis Tsipras used Syriza's election success in Greece to enter into a coalition with the openly racist right-wing conservative party, the Independent Greeks (Anel).

This alliance of social democrats and "lefts" with right-wingers, racists and fascists is symptomatic of the rapid intensification of the international economic and social crisis. Amid unprecedented social inequality and the division of society into rich and poor, the entire bourgeois political spectrum—parties from the "left" to the right—is closing ranks on the basis of nationalism. They all seek to divert growing class tensions in a right-wing, nationalist and racist direction.

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